

May 7, 2015

I want to thank the committee for hearing our concerns today. My name is Jay Miller. I am a proud 31 year Michigan educator and practicing a High School Counselor in DeWitt, representing the Michigan School Counselor Association. MSCA is the recognized branch of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). I was a first generation college student. My Dad worked at the "Olds" right here in Lansing for 35 years. My aunt, who worked in admissions, convinced my Mom that I should go to college. I graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Education and my Master's in Occupational Education from Ferris State. In addition, I have a Master of Arts in Counseling from Michigan State.

Similar to the poor condition of our states roads, the state of school counseling is a complex issue that did not just happen over-night. There are no easy solutions. We applaud and support any and all efforts to increase the college, career readiness and most importantly the success of all Michigan students. We also welcome this bills awareness that school counselors need different professional development training than what teacher's receive. However, this measure in my opinion, is like repairing a few worn out bridges on I-75 or I-96. While good for a few, it will have very little impact on the remainder of the state. And it has no chance of moving the college and career readiness needle. Quite frankly, college and career counseling is integral and the most fun part of my job, but there should be no allusion's here that this measure will have any impact on improving K-12 students' academic performance, coping skills, study skills, test taking skills, improving time management, or building the social and emotional resiliency necessary to be successful in any career. **These** are the factors that **have** been proven to increase college and career readiness and **should** be the largest part of what school counselors does.

The data and trends are clear. Michigan is 46<sup>th</sup> out of 50 states in student to school counselor ratio, 728-1, and increasing (2012-13 data). Nearly three times the recommended ratio 250-1. Michigan has no mandate for school counselors. 30 other states require at least a high school counselor. Many Michigan schools do not even have one. This bill does not change that.

The premise and stated rational for this new requirement I find true but disingenuous as to how to improve it. The survey posed the question to existing school counselors (College Board's National Office for School Counselor Advocacy) on if they felt confident in their knowledge of the college admission processes. There are 4700+ post-secondary institutions in the U.S. In my opinion, ANY school counselor who says they know it all is clearly practicing unethically or irrational. No Physician, Dentist, Plumber or Mechanic would state that they could not learn more about their ever changing profession!

College and Career Counseling is a constantly moving target. School Counselors have an ethical OBLIGATION to keep current, like any profession. Counselors must host and attend college fairs, build working relationships with admission representatives, keep up with changes in the common application, be a resource for testing changes etc. I completed my MA in counseling couple of decades back. Does anyone here think that if I had been required to take a course at completion back then, it would still apply today? There have been thousands of advances in technology like that whole internet and cell phone thing.

There is absolutely no research that indicates a course in college counseling at any level can increase college and career readiness. None.

My understanding is that this only applies to new graduates or new school counselors and practicing counselors will be required to pass an assessment. With Michigan's declining student population, there are very few new school counselors ever hired. More often, when a school counselor retires or moves, the position is not replaced and the duties are shared. The Michigan Department of Education is not able to

enforce EXISTING laws and regulations. Here is a perfect example; since the early 2000's, all Michigan students have been required to do what is called an educational development plan (EDP) starting in 7th grade. It is supposed to be annually updated and signed by parents. Required elements include a career assessment, high school course plan, selection of career pathway and research and selection of several post-secondary training admission options/requirements. We use the Career Cruising on-line system at DeWitt. Sounds great right? Very few schools do this. Why? Primarily because there are too few school counselors and those that do exist are often ethically drawn to pressing social and emotional triage needs and other assigned administrative duties. Furthermore no one from MDE checks to see if it is done.

I am fortunate to work in a wonderful district and community with a 98% graduation rate and 95% post-secondary attendance rate. I am confident I could pass the test. But what would happen if I didn't?

So what will work from our perspective? One thing is the proper utilization of school counselors where they do exist. Last year, MSCA advocated and acquired a best practice in the K-12 school aid budget that says if a school adopts a comprehensive school counseling program using counselors for what they are trained to do, they were eligible for some additional FTE dollars. The model requires an annual management agreement between the administration and the counselor that provides limits on how much time they are assigned to non-counseling duties like, watching the lunch room, counting the test books and doing the scheduling. MDE report that 132 schools have indicated they are doing it. I personally have spent most of the last week creating the master schedule for next year, monitoring AP tests and coordinating the M-STEP assessment for our school.

We are the practicing professionals, boots on the ground so to speak, doing the work with Michigan students. We would like to request that the Michigan School Counselor Association be added to the development and approval process, along with MCAN, as this bill as it continues. Additionally we would support a state wide purchase of the Career Cruising system to help ensure the Educational Development Planning of all students was coordinated and less indiscriminate. Where no school counselor exists, teachers and administrators could be required to help students complete it each year. There is a surplus of research that points to what we should really be doing from a policy basis based on what does works. It is often complex and expensive. Our association is ready and willing to help. We have recently re-established a working relationship with the Career and Technical Education division of MDE. They are in the process of hiring a person dedicated to school counseling for our state after all most a decade of vacancy. The MCAN folks have done a wonderful job of raising awareness and increasing the college and career counseling issue. While very well intended, this bill only fills in a few potholes, puts a band aid on a broken leg and does not put a single additional school counselor in place that truly can have a major impact on the improvement of our College and Career readiness. We can and must do more than this, our students deserve it. Thank-you.

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